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Under Republican Leadership K12 Education System Thrives for All

Throughout this budget process we have heard thousands of citizens across the state voice their concerns regarding the K-12 education system. Much of that concern is rooted in fear mongering and “the sky is falling” scare tactics orchestrated by powerful special interest groups, mirroring the misinformation of Act 10 in 2011.

Contrary to what these special interests would like you to believe, the K-12 education system is not being “eviscerated” or “gutted”. Compared to 2010, Wisconsin is stronger and more flexible to cater to all the needs of our children -- especially our most vulnerable -- and the results are showing it. Graduation rates are up for both our African American and Latino students since 2010. Wisconsin’s ACT scores continue to rise and rank 2nd in the nation in 2013. In 2013, fourth grade reading and math ranked at or above the national average. Eighth grade reading and math scores are also ranked above the national average. Wisconsin’s schools aren’t only making the grade, they’re busting the curve.

When the Governor proposed his biennial budget, it included a \$127 million cut to our K12 education system. My colleagues and I made it our number one priority to restore these cuts. However, we didn’t stop there; we reinvested \$196 million into our K12 system. For the second consecutive budget we have increased per pupil revenue in the state budget. In fact, a [report](#) released just this month showed that Wisconsin is above the national average (\$10,700) in per-pupil spending, ranking in the top half of the nation.

Wisconsin Republicans have also endorsed a pro-choice type of approach for our most vulnerable children, providing them with a personalized method to education in order to provide the best educational outcome possible. In order to be eligible for voucher school subsidies, a family must not exceed 185% of the federal poverty level, allowing families who would otherwise not be able to afford another educational opportunity the ability to do so. This ability for a low-income student to leave a failing school is critically important. It would be irresponsible and shameful to allow government to get in the way of a child’s education.

Contrary to our neighbors to the south, who since 2009 have cut the Illinois education budget by more than \$861 million, Wisconsin Republicans have given school districts the tools and flexibilities to be able to meet the needs of an evolving educational landscape. For example, through changes to their employee health care and pension plans, the Green Bay School District was able to save over \$11 million dollars -- money that can now be used for the students, not employee pensions. In fact, when I met with the leadership of the Milwaukee Public School (MPS) system earlier this year, they told me point blank: “Act 10 saved MPS.” In total, as of October 2013, school districts alone have saved over \$1.8 billion as a direct result of our Act 10 reforms.

Finally, thank you to the thousands of teachers, administrators, school board members, community leaders, and parents who have met with, called in, and written to me and every other member of the legislature to share their concerns. Your input truly matters, and we have worked to craft a budget that preserves and strengthens Wisconsin’s commitment to educational excellence.